

**Access to Microfinance & Improved Implementation of Policy Reform
(AMIR Program)**

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Business Associations Communications/Public Relations Consultancy

Final Report

Deliverable for Business Association Initiative

Task 2.4.7 Communications # 2

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Executive Summary

The major challenge confronted during this consultancy was a loss of momentum in terms of communications and advocacy programs by the Business Associations.

The *Jordan Vision 2020* was essentially at a stalemate. Despite a number of committee meetings among representatives of the signatory BA's, there was no action plan in place. Neither was there any proposal before AMIR from the associations that indicated a practicable plan for moving forward.

In the case of the Business and Professional Women's Association, internal problems within the organization effectively precluded any practical communications initiatives. Nonetheless, the BPWA was moving forward effectively in advocacy and lobbying of parliament. In the process, the group is acquiring a political astuteness and sensitivity to emerging public issues that could potentially be of great value in helping to guide the advocacy and communications efforts of other associations.

Overall, there has been a considerable loss of momentum in the commitment of the BA's to active communications and public awareness programs. This impasse appears to arise from varied sources, among them competing demands on the time of leaders and members and lack of a clear agenda.

I believe there are four primary reasons underlying this situation:

- Much of the substance of Vision 2020 is already being implemented by the royal court and the government, undercutting the motivation to mount and sustain a public 'crusade'.
- Many of the leaders of the BAs are still not confident of their ability to communicate with the public or use the news media effectively. This became clear at the media training session with Zehn Ghanma.
- The concept of mobilizing opinion and support among the broad Jordanian public is an alien one to BA leadership, who are themselves members of an elite.
- The competing demands on the time of leaders and members of the associations have intensified.

Against this background, I believe there is still a recognition that Jordan Vision 2020 is important, and is uniquely suited to communicate to the publics inside and outside Jordan that there is a different agenda and changed set of priorities in the country. With Jordanians experience of a flat economy for most of the Nineties and a peace process that has yet to yield any dividends, this is a vitally important message.

Objectives of the Consultancy

Based on this situation analysis, the consultancy focused on four targets of challenge and opportunity:

1. Identify the Young Entrepreneurs Association as the only BA with any real potential for taking charge of the Jordan Vision 2020 program, which to succeed must focus almost exclusively on public awareness.

To this end, we worked with Ghalia Alul, executive director of the YEA, to put together a proposal and budget for Jordan Vision 2020 that would win the confidence of AMIR and break the stalemate. We also agreed that financial participation by the signatory BA's was essential, even at a nominal level, as a visible measure of commitment.

2. Build confidence and capability in the leaders of the associations in terms of their ability to deal effectively with the news media and to articulate the meaning of Jordan Vision 2020 in detail.

An initial media training session with Zehn Ghanma and Rami Khouri was scheduled, and drew a dozen leaders from the associations for a day of work on message development and presentation. The initial session was very popular with participants, and seemed to have quite an invigorating effect by building confidence. People felt they were learning how to do something effectively and acquiring useful techniques.

3. Elicit the commitment of a substantial number of the signatory organizations to Jordan Vision 2020 to undertake a limited number of practical and doable communications activities in support of Vision 2020. The commitments we had been seeking proved to be too open-ended and posed too great a demand on the resources and time of the member associations. It is essential to shift the focus to activities they can accomplish over their short term and away from goals that are too ambitious and impractical.

4. Identify a specific communications role for INT@J as the future-oriented vanguard of the Jordanian economy. The Reach Initiative is central to achieving the goals of Jordan Vision 2020, and the members of INT@J provide the proof of its

feasibility. It is important to use their voices, particularly in communicating with the worldwide business community.

A Strategy for Reinvigorating the Jordan Vision 2020 Program

Because of events that have taken place since the end of the consultancy -- the successful public presentation of the Jordan Vision 2020 goals for education/and the approval of a program and budget for the management of the Jordan Vision 2020 program under YEA oversight -- it is now possible to reinvigorate the Vision 2020 program and move ahead.

This is a dramatic change from the position of the program only two months earlier, and a significant achievement.

The first key component is to focus now on accomplishing some tangible, short-term objectives, so that Jordan Vision 2020 becomes 'real' as a program instead of an abstraction. We are already working on this, looking at placing both editorial articles and advertisements in airline magazines of carriers serving Amman. Rola Abdelhamid is already in touch with the publishers of *Royal Wings*, the Royal Jordanian magazine. I see these as essentially demonstration projects.

Second, we must make realistic demands on the participating BA's, and ask them to sign onto limited, doable tasks. We do not need any more committee meetings: Vision 2020 cannot be managed by committee. What we do need to do is to ask individual BA's to commit to doing one or two projects over the next six months: getting the Zarqa Chamber of Commerce to commit to staging two public briefings on Vision 2020, one in Zarqa and perhaps a second at the Zarqa QIZ.

Third, we need to work closely with the program administrator whose job and responsibility will be to oversee and implement the Vision 2020 program. It is important to ensure a good launch.

Fourth, it is important to establish Vision 2020 as a 'brand' through an active media relations effort, including strategic advertising.

Fifth, in terms of media training, I would propose broadening participation, as well as offering a second phase session to groups of three or four that focus exclusively on speaking and interviewing technique. (The first session focuses largely on message development and communication.)

The Role of INT@J

I would propose that AMIR next work closely with INT@J -- involving as well the director of the Jordan Vision 2020 program when hired -- on developing a pilot program for communications targeting the high-tech press in Europe and the US. It is important for INT@J -- and for the credibility of Jordan Vision 2020 -- to build awareness of the emerging IT industry in the country across the global IT industry. The point is to put Jordan on the map of the emerging economy.

This is a communications program that can gradually be transferred to INT@J. While in the US, I have been exploring various media directories and news release distribution systems.

Changing Roles, Changing Environment

In meeting with Ala'a Al-Kurdi from BPWA, it became clear that the void of leadership there is not the only issue. In fact, they are pursuing the changing of the social security law very effectively. In fact, the likely changes to emerge from parliament stand to be broader than those sought originally. The BPWA's lobbying has been apparently quite effective, and they have determined -- and been advised -- that it is not in their interests to make social security reform a public issue. Nevertheless, they are operating strategically and effectively, and we should be gratified.

From the experience thus far, Ala'a Kurdi was able to confirm a growing sense that I have had: that there is a mounting and critical opposition to what is perceived by conservatives as foreign influence operating behind the scenes to change laws and policies in Jordan. I believe, as does she, that we must become acutely sensitive to this. It has emerged at each of the public briefings the BPWA has held on social security reform.

The BPWA has faced the question repeatedly of "Who is behind this ?" I think we can expect this to become a larger issue when programs such as the Aqaba Special Economic Zone kick in does not have with similar questions being raised.

While the BPWA does not have public awareness or communications agenda at the moment, I think that the organization -- at least in the person of Al-Kurdi -- could be quite helpful by reviewing other public awareness programs with us, e.g. Jordan Vision 2020, and advising us on issues.

Conclusion

The AMIR Program has been successful to date and to a considerable degree in imparting to the business associations both a command of the tools of advocacy and communications and programs, such as Jordan Vision 2020, where they can be used to make a real difference in the country's future.

We must be realistic, however, on two fronts. First, we cannot lose sight of the fact that these are unfamiliar concepts that are difficult to master. People do not come naturally to communicating with a wide audience. Most of us are instinctively uncomfortable in front of a microphone or talking to a reporter.

We need also to bear in mind that marshalling public opinion in support of or in opposition to an issue has not in the past been a particularly useful strategy in Jordan. Learning to use strategic communications and advocacy effectively will take time, persistence and ongoing training.

Second, we need to keep in perspective the actual resources available to most of the business associations, and scale expectations of their involvement in advocacy and communications to demands they are able and willing to meet.

I believe that we are at a juncture where we can look forward to the BA's scoring some 'wins' in terms of communications and advocacy, where they will see a tangible payoff for their efforts. This is a critical step and one that will provide very positive reinforcement.